



Tennessee First to the Top Monthly Update

January

- Standards and Assessments – Tennessee continued participation with the PARCC planning work around developing support pieces for states to implement Common Core standards. Tennessee made plans to utilize curriculum maps and pacing guides for training on Common Core during summer 2011 provided through PARCC.
- Data – The Tennessee Department of Education (the Department) submitted the RFP for the new teacher evaluation data collection system to be approved by the Department of Finance and Administration and the Comptroller's Office. The team working on the early warning data system in the P-12 data warehouse planned educator focus groups for February. These meetings will provide educator feedback that will directly impact the usability and design of the platform the early warning data system deploys.
- Great Teachers and Leaders – The Department announced four winners in the Innovation Acceleration Fund competition. The winning four school districts, Knox County, Lexington City, Putnam County, and Trousdale County, all committed to district level changes to compensation structures and sustainability after the grant period ends. Department staff continued training with the schools participating in the state field test on the TAP observation rubric for a new evaluation system. Schools were introduced to the TAP online portal to provide greater depth of understanding about the observation. Battelle for Kids facilitated training across the state in strategic compensation models for all local education agencies (LEAs) to attend. Battelle for Kids also worked with Department field service staff to train on resources available from Battelle for Kids and Battelle for Kids field staff for use this semester. The Department finalized letters from Governor Haslam and Commissioner Smith to invite teachers to take the Tennessee's version of a working conditions survey, the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey, in February. Department staff worked to plan the competitive process for high need LEAs to receive support from the Distinguished Professionals program next year which will place experts in the classroom in high needs areas. The Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee met and voted on the options for educators in the 15% student achievement portion of the new evaluation system. The TEAC also developed ongoing items to be addressed in their final report.
- School Turnaround – Tennessee released the list of schools not making Adequate Yearly progress (AYP) this month for the 2009/10 school year. The new schools on the list will receive

funds for part of this school year if they qualify as Focus or Renewal schools. Department staff is planning a new round of School Improvement Grants to support the most high need schools. The Department is also pursuing changes to the state definition of persistently lowest achieving schools with the new data received from last year's test scores. The Achievement School District (ASD) staff continues plans for school takeover next year. They completed on-site evaluation in potential ASD schools of successful strategies in those schools and areas in great need of improvement.

- STEM – Department staff analyzed school data around middle grades math performance in order to target First to the Top resources to the schools in greatest need as part of the STEM projects. Plans were made to meet with leaders from the SITES-M program in early February to ensure the schools targeted in that program are among those targeted by the state. The Battelle Memorial Institute grant for the STEM Innovation Network was finalized after receiving approval of required budget changes from USED.
- Higher Education and Teacher Preparation – The Tennessee Higher Education Commission has finalized the Request for Proposals (RFP) for higher education institutions to provide STEM professional development to K-12 teachers. The RFP will be released statewide on February 1st. Plans for the School Leaders Study are examining the possibility of using that study as a mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of school leader preparation programs as well as availability of school leaders. The College Access and Success Network is in the final stages of contract negotiations for expansion of the network statewide.
- Scopes of Work – Department staff met to prepare the launch of partnership meetings with every LEA. These meetings began in January and are focused on identifying exactly what resources in Scopes of Work are targeted to meeting the identified student performance goals as well as to identify what areas LEAs need additional support from the state. The Department also planned and scheduled the first stakeholder meeting to launch a new Instructional Learning Network to support all LEAs in implementing First to the Top programs and improving educator quality.
- Education Delivery Unit – In January, the Education Delivery Unit (EDU) held a number of activities to increase the capacity of the agency and education system. It held its sixth performance workshop with TDOE and THEC staff, this workshop focused on assisting staff in building stakeholder engagement strategies for delivery plans and other initiatives. It provided training to TDOE regional staff on how to lead "partnership meetings" that are being held with all individual school districts in January and February to identify their strategies to meet state goals and what their needs are from the state. It worked with goal delivery teams on completing stakeholder engagement, benchmarking, and risk mitigation plans. The US Education Delivery Institute completed its second capacity review of Tennessee, indicating areas of progress and continuing challenge for the EDU and state leadership to address. EDU staff partnered with regional staff to conduct its first field visit with a school district on the high school graduation goal. Finally, the EDU partnered with the State Board of Education and

Tennessee Higher Education Commission in finalizing its goals, indicators, and targets for student performance. The SBE approved these indicators and targets on January 27, 2011.

- Communications – The Communications Department conducted two webinars for education stakeholders and district staff regarding the TELL TN Learning Conditions survey. Education stakeholders and partners also conducted similar webinars and in person meeting with educators in preparation for the February 14 launch of the survey. In conjunction with Department staff, the Communications Office also established a user-friendly document for educators to use as Tennessee rolls out Common Core Standards training. The Communications Department continues to work on a statewide outreach to educators on the state's new evaluation system. The Department plans to hold webinars for educators in February.
- Budget – As part of Governor Haslam's first set of budget hearings, Tennessee's First to the Top team prepared information on the grant program for the new administration. Tennessee also received approval for an initial set of budget amendments from USED which impact the STEM Innovation Network budget, the teacher evaluation budget, and the budget of the Education Delivery Unit. A second round of budget amendments is being prepared.
- Transition – Governor Haslam was sworn in on January 15. The previous day, the Governor announced that Patrick Smith, the Executive Director of First to the Top, would serve as Acting Commissioner of Education while the Governor completed a nationwide search for a permanent Commissioner. The Governor and his staff elected to retain several key First to the Top implementation and oversight staff, including Commissioner Smith, through the transition.